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ABSTRACT

This unit is guided by the question "How is history constructed?" In this unit, middle to secondary school students explore a variety of accounts of the clash of cultures that occurred between the Spanish and the Aztecs. Students examine a variety of primary sources and analyze the various perspectives presented. The six activities include: (1) "The Letters of Hernando Cortes"; (2) "The 'True' History of the Conquest"; (3) "The Florentine Codex"; (4) "Songs of Sorrow"; (5) "Danza de la Conquista"; and (6) "The Aztecs and the Spanish in Diego Rivera's Murals." Each activity is introduced with background information for the teacher and includes student resource materials. A closure activity ends the unit. (EH)

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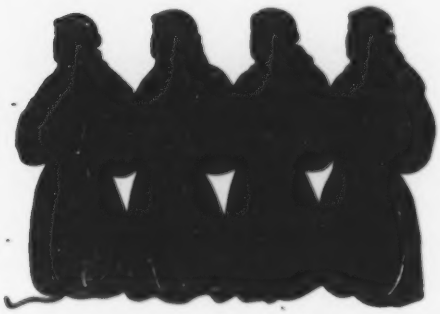

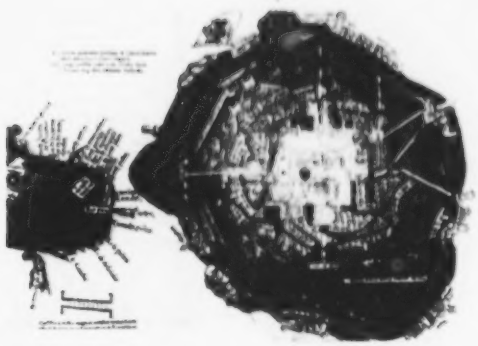

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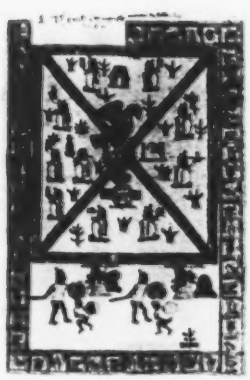

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VISIONS OF HISTORY:

THE AZTECS AND THE SPANISH

Developed by
Lucía Nuñez

and the staff of The Latin America Project
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SPICE
Institute for International Studies (IIS)
Stanford University, Littlefield Center, Room 14
300 Lasuen Street
Stanford, CA 94305-5013
Telephone: 800-578-1114
Email: Spice.Sales@Forsythe.Stanford.Edu

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Unit Introduction

VISIONS OF HISTORY: THE AZTECS AND THE SPANISH

History is a construct. . . Any point of entry is possible and all choices are arbitrary. Still, there are definitive moments, moments we use as references, because they break our sense of continuity, they change the direction of time. We can look at these events and we can say that after them things were never the same again.

—Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*, page 4

Teacher Background

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, history is defined as "a chronological record of significant events usually including an explanation of their causes." Yet reading different accounts of one event in history reveals the complexity of the process of writing history. This process is not just a simple recording of events, but rather a complex process. Like a chemical which reacts with air or water, the history of an event also changes with time, with the introduction of new ideas, and with shifts in ways of thinking.

What are the steps in the process of writing history? What happens when an event is witnessed by a group of people? Some choose to write about it, while others talk about it. Others who did not witness the event, write about it. How does the telling of the event change as information is exchanged and retold? What happens if people write about an event long after it occurs? Are some things lost or forgotten? Why are there so many interpretations of one event? The act of visually recording an event adds a new dimension to the "writing" of history. And yet even with video recordings, interpretations may radically differ.

The Quincentenary anniversary in 1992 of Columbus's landing in the Americas was a perfect illustration of how the "history" of one event can take on new perspectives. In order to better prepare students to evaluate the onslaught of sometimes conflicting information, students need tools and skills to analyze and process information. In doing so, their understanding of history and the writing of history is increased.

The question "How is history constructed?" guides the unit *Visions of History: The Aztecs and the Spanish* by exploring a variety of accounts of the clash of cultures that occurred between the Spanish and the Aztecs. Students read excerpts from the letters of Hernando Cortés, analyze poetry by the Aztecs, and discuss contemporary art of this period of history. A set of sub-questions further breaks down the big question: From whose perspective is this account written? Who is writing the history? What is left out? How are the people and places described? Throughout the unit the students will be working with key words such as **perspective, interpretation, fact, omission, language, balance, bias, audience,** and **truth** to analyze the documents presented in this unit. The

principal goal of this unit is to examine an event in history through a variety of lenses.

In *Visions of History: The Aztecs and the Spanish,* the students will participate in six activities. The first two activities present primary documents written by the Spanish. *Activity One* contains the letters of Hernando Cortés and *Activity Two* uses the writings of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a soldier who was part of the Cortés Expedition. In *Activities Three and Four,* the students examine Aztec documents that provide a different point of view. *Activity Three* uses text from the Florentine Codex describing the first meeting of Cortés and Montezuma. *Activity Four* describes the sentiments of the Aztecs about the fall of their city using poems and paintings. The last activities of the unit take a different approach by presenting contemporary art and customs. The purpose of including these activities is to illustrate to the students how time also affects the telling of history. In addition, students will see that history is not only written but transmitted through story telling, dance, and art. *Activity Five* contains photographs of a dance to illustrate how history is transmitted from one generation to another. And finally *Activity Six* uses the murals of Diego Rivera to demonstrate how an artist portrays historical information.

Presenting a balance of the different accounts of this historical event, a goal of this unit, was not an easy task. For many years, the versions of the history of the events that took place were written using the first hand accounts of Hernando Cortés or Bernal Díaz del Castillo. The "other side of the story" was left out. The ancient writings of the Aztecs were burned by Spanish friars who believed that these would inhibit the conversion of the people to Christianity. The history written by Aztec priests after the conquest was collected by Franciscan friars. The text, paintings, and poetry used in the activities are selected from some of these ancient manuscripts.

Visions of History: The Aztecs and the Spanish is adapted from the SPICE unit *Two Visions of the Conquest* using the Complex Instruction model. Language is one of the key elements in analyzing a piece of history. How people and places are described is another way to understand a particular author's point of view. Terms such as conquest, invasion, pre-Columbian, and Indian are worthy of careful discussion. What do these terms mean? Why were these people called "Indians"? Why is the coming of Columbus to the Americas used as the point of reference? Answering these questions and others will increase the students' understanding of how history is constructed.

Group Work

The design of *Visions of History: The Aztecs and the Spanish* is based on many years of research in the Stanford School of Education by Dr. Elizabeth Cohen, and more recently Dr. Rachel Lotan, on how to increase student access to learning through group work. This research by The Program for Complex Instruction led to the development of a teaching approach and a model for curriculum materials. The teaching approach itself is a complex one and involves intensive professional development for full implementation. These materials are not designed to introduce

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that approach to the novice. They do, however, fit the model for curriculum materials and may be useful to teachers using the complex instruction approach. It is our hope that material developed in this way will also be useful to teachers using other cooperative, small group teaching strategies.

Group work units contain 6-8 activities organized around a big idea, central question, or major concept of a discipline. Students rotate through a series of group activities designed to stimulate thinking and discussion about the big idea. When students report the results of their investigations, the teacher needs to ask questions that probe the students' understanding, make connections among the different activities, and address the fundamental content of the unit.

At the heart of these curricular materials are resource materials which draw heavily on primary sources and provide students with greater access to the academic content of the unit. When students examine photographs or listen to tapes in addition to textual material, they have increased access to the learning task. Even students who cannot read at grade level will participate more.

Each activity includes a group project that is multi-dimensional and encourages the use of multi-media. These projects give more students the opportunity to contribute to the success of the group and demonstrate and be recognized for their own competence and understanding of the content. Increased participation is related to increased learning. These materials combine a group project which reinforces the students' interdependence and an individual report which holds students individually accountable.

An important feature of this curriculum model is the open-ended nature of the questions. Most questions do not have one right or wrong answer and the group products also depend on the group's decision. This design feature contributes to the development of higher-order thinking skills.

In *Visions of History: The Aztecs and the Spanish*, an activity at the beginning is included to set the stage for studying the question "How is history constructed?" The *Orientation Activity* explores how people can write or tell about the same event from different points of view.

At the core of the unit are six activities that specifically address the big question. Each activity includes a section for the teacher with background information, extension questions to assist the teacher in debriefing the presentations, and a list of related issues to serve as further research or discussion items. The activity also includes a set of cards for the students: an *Activity Card*, which includes background information, questions, and a task the group must complete; a set of *Resource Card(s)*, which are needed to complete the task; and an *Individual Report*, which serves to enforce individual accountability and to give the teacher a measure of the students' understanding of the big idea.

unit introduction

At the end of the unit is the *Closure Activity* in which students will portray their understanding of how differing perspectives can influence and shape the way history is written.

Multiple Abilities

In order to ensure access to learning, multiple ability tasks are incorporated in each of the activities. The following is a list of some of the multiple abilities that the students will need to complete the various activities in this unit:

- Linguistic abilities
  - understanding how a text fits into the big picture
  - translating the message of the text into another form
  - identifying the main point of the text
- Visual and spatial abilities
  - grasping the message of a picture
  - recognizing symbols
  - noting details in pictures
- Musical abilities
  - hearing and creating rhythmic patterns
  - hearing and creating melodies
- Dramatic abilities
  - expressing feelings, messages, and situations through acting
- Logical-Mathematical
  - understanding logical and numerical patterns
- Spatial
  - perceiving the visual-spatial world accurately
- Interpersonal
  - responding appropriately to others
- Intrapersonal
  - knowing one's feelings, strengths, and weaknesses

Reference Materials

Cohen, Elizabeth G. *Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.

Nelson, Cathy. *Navigating the Quincentennial: A Question of Balance*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Council of Social Studies, 1991.

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Teacher Preparation

PREPARING FOR GROUP ACTIVITIES

Structure

The Complex Instruction model is also based on the idea that true understanding of a concept comes only through working with that concept repeatedly. Ideally each group should have the opportunity to experience each activity—in this case the students go through six "rounds." But if time does not permit, at least two or three rounds of activities are recommended. The chart below demonstrates how all the groups could experience six rounds.

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Group F
Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4	Activity 5	Activity 6
Activity 6	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4	Activity 5
Activity 5	Activity 6	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4
Activity 4	Activity 5	Activity 6	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
Activity 3	Activity 4	Activity 5	Activity 6	Activity 1	Activity 2
Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4	Activity 5	Activity 6	Activity 1

Roles

Many teachers find that assigning roles to each member of the group encourages full participation. The following roles have been found effective:

- **Facilitator**: makes sure everyone understands the instructions; makes sure all the group members participate; calls the teacher if no one in the group knows the answer; and makes sure that all members of the group get the help they need.
- **Recorder**: makes sure group has notes from the discussion; and makes sure everyone completes an individual report.
- **Materials Manager:** collects whatever materials are needed to complete the task.
- **Harmonizer**: makes sure communication lines are open; and makes sure there are no "put downs."
- **Reporter**: organizes the group's report to the class; discusses with the group what will be reported; and summarizes the activity to introduce the report to the class.[1]

teacher preparation

Time and Suggested Sequence of Activities

The following sequence and suggested time is recommended for the activities:

ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED TIME
•Orientation Activity	1-2 class periods
•Activities 1 through 6 -Group work: reading the cards and answering the questions -Preparing presentation -Presentations	 30 minutes 10 minutes 10 minutes per group
•Closure Activity	1 hour

Materials and Equipment

The following is a list of suggested materials for use in the activities.

- •Butcher paper
- •Construction paper
- •Cardboard boxes of all sizes
- •Costumes and props
- •Clay or other materials to make sculptures
- •Markers of all sizes
- •Scissors
- •Magazines
- •Card stock
- •Video or still camera

Teacher Preparation

1. It is advisable to laminate the Activity and Resource Cards so that they can be reused. Another option is to insert them in plastic sleeves.
2. Ideally, each group should have its own working area. Depending on what is available, this area could be a table with chairs for each student or the individual desks of the students placed close together. The Cards should be at each groups' working area before the students get started.
3. Maintain a section of the classroom with materials for the students to complete their group tasks. This section should be designated so that the Materials Manager knows where s/he can go to obtain supplies for their group.

Optional Activities

- Have a table where the projects can be displayed throughout the duration of the unit.
- If possible, videotape, record, or photograph the various groups' performances.

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[1]Elizabeth G. Cohen and Michael Chatfield. *Complex Instruction in the Middle School Implementation Manual: A Guide to Teaching and Classroom Management*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Program for Complex Instruction, 1991). 19-20.

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Orientation Activity

TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY

Overview

The purpose of the *Orientation Activity* is to give students an opportunity to experience first hand how different accounts of an event can emerge. The students will witness an event and then analyze the historical accounts written and/or told about it. Some students will participate in staging the event, others will be witnesses, and others will miss the event. How each remembers the event will demonstrate to the students the complexity of writing history.

Objectives

- to think critically about the question "How is history constructed?"
- to analyze a staged classroom event from multiple perspectives
- to learn that "getting all the facts" is a difficult task
- to define the words **perspective, interpretation, fact, omission, language, balance, bias, audience,** and **truth**

Time

One or two class periods

Materials

- Newsprint
- Handout 1, *Key Words*
- Handout 2, *Key Words—Definitions, Synonyms, & Questions*
- Teacher's Guide 1, *Teacher's Directions for Staged Event*
- Teacher's Guide 2, *Directions for Student B*
- Teacher's Guide 3, *Directions for Student C*

Introduction

This activity encourages students to understand that interpreting "what happened" in a historical event is a difficult and complex process. The majority of the students will watch an unexpected event take place and then write the history of what they saw. Some students who were out of the room during the staged event will try to decide what "really happened." In addition they will attempt to write a history of what they think really happened.

Suggested Procedure

For the Homework Assignment

1. Tell the students that they are about to begin a new unit on the history of the conquest of Mexico. In addition to learning about what happened when the Spanish landed in what is now known as Mexico, they will also analyze how history is written. Distribute a copy of Handout 1, *Key Words* to each student in the class. Explain to the students that this list of key words will be important throughout the unit.

2. Inform the students that as a homework assignment they will need to find the definitions and synonyms for each of these words. Explain to them that they do not need to worry about the questions until later.

3. Write each of the words on sheets of newsprint. Once the students have completed their homework assignment, solicit their definitions and synonyms. Keep the newsprint of definitions visible throughout all the activities. Discuss each of the terms so that the students become familiar with them. Ask for examples or sentences using the words. Pose the questions listed below to give them an example of the word's definition. Inform the students that these questions should be used as a guide as they continue studying about the Spanish and the Aztecs.

- **Perspective**: From whose point of view is the account being written? What is their position?
- **Interpretation**: Who is writing? What is fact? What is perspective?
- **Fact**: Is the version being presented historically accurate?
- **Omission**: What is being left out? What information is missing?
- **Language**: How are events, places, and people described?
- **Balance**: Which side is being told? Are there other versions?
- **Bias**: How is the account one sided?
- **Audience**: For whom is the document being written? Why is this important?
- **Truth**: How do you know that this is the "true" history of the conquest?

4. At some point during this activity stop for one moment to send two students on an errand. For example, you could arrange with the front office for the students to deliver something or pick something up. These students will then miss the staged event. See Teacher's Guide 1, *Teacher's Directions for Staged Event*, for more complete directions.

5. Resume the activity and at a pre-selected cue have two students perform a prescribed activity (this will have to be arranged prior to class, but should not take too much preparation). What the event might look like is described in Teacher's Guide 1. Of course, you may choose to do something entirely different. A suggested adaptation for this lesson is provided at the end of the Suggested Procedure section for teachers who prefer not to have student involvement in this phase of the activity.

6. When the event ends, tell students that their task is to "write the history of what just happened." Students may ask several questions about this task, but do not give them too many clues. Simply tell them that they are to write the history of the event to the best of their abilities. They should include whatever they think is important in understanding what happened, and they should be specific in their details. Although students may not remember everything that was written on the chalkboard, encourage them to write down as much as

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they can remember. The students who helped stage the event should also write the history.

7. When the two students on the errand return, tell them that something just took place, and that their task is to figure out what happened. Explain that the other students are writing histories of the event and will read them aloud. The two students who went on the errand should decide what they think really happened. Either all of the histories may be read aloud, or a representative sample—until no new information can be added. The two students should listen to all of the histories and attempt to reconstruct the history of the event. Either these students can reconstruct what they think happened verbally or as a writing assignment. If it is a writing assignment, the debriefing can occur on the following day.

8. Debrief the activity first with the students who went on the errand, then with the students who witnessed the event, and finally with the students who participated in staging the event. Discuss the following:

Debriefing of students who went on the errand

- What did you think really happened? How did you reach this conclusion? Are you absolutely sure of your decisions? Why or why not?
- When you heard all the different accounts, how did you decide what to include in your version of the history of the event? How did you decide which descriptions to use?
- Describe what it was like reconstructing the history of the event. How was it difficult? How was it easy?
- What other information would you need to write the most accurate history of the event?

Debriefing students who witnessed the event

- Ask 2 or 3 students to read their histories.
- What elements do these versions have in common?
- How are the histories different? How are they similar?
- Why do you think there are different interpretations?
- Which accounts are more accurate? How do you know this?
- Describe what it was like to write the history of this event.
- How was it difficult? How was it easy?
- Discuss what it might be like to write the history of a major historical event such as a war, an assassination, or an election.

Debriefing of students who staged the event

- How did you feel being part of staging the event?
- Did you know some information that the witnesses did not have? How does access to information affect the writing of history?
- How is inside information important to the writing of the history of the event?
- Describe what it was like to write the history of this event.
- How was it difficult? How was it easy?

9. Conclude the debriefing by telling the students that the writing of historical events is a complicated process. Equally complicated is reading about historical events. How do we know what really happened? How do we know what we are reading is true? Distribute copies of Handout 2, *Key Words—Definitions, Synonyms, & Questions* to each of the students. Remind them that they will continue to use these handouts in other activities.

Suggested Adaptation

Instead of involving students in the "staged event," you could choose to perform an outrageous act yourself. For example, you could break from the discussion of perspective and begin to recite a lecture that you were planning for another course. Write one or two sentences on the chalkboard. Pause a few seconds and then erase what you just wrote. Then acting flustered or disturbed, stop the lecture and walk out of the room. You could also involve a colleague in the performance.

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KEY WORDS

Key Words	Definition, Synonyms, & Questions
perspective	
interpretation	
fact	
omission	
language	
balance	
bias	
audience	
truth	

handout 2

KEY WORDS—DEFINITIONS, SYNONYMS, & QUESTIONS

Key Words	Definition, Synonyms, & Questions
perspective	**Definition:** the capacity to view things in their true relation or relative importance **Synonyms:** point of view; outlook; position; angle; approach; vision **Questions:** From whose point of view is the account being written? What is their position?
interpretation (from the verb to interpret)	D: to explain or tell the meaning of S: explain; discover the meaning of; unravel; translate Q: Who is writing? What is fact? What is perspective? How does the person who is writing know what happened?
fact	D: a piece of information presented as the truth S: reality; truth; evidence Q: Is the information presented historically accurate?
omission (from the verb to omit)	D: to leave out or leave unmentioned S: exclude; remove; eliminate Q: What is being left out? What information is missing?
language	D: the words, their pronunciation and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community S: speech; talk; vocabulary Q: How are the events, places, and people described?
balance	D: equality between the two sides of an account S: equal; even; match up with Q: Which side is being told? Are their other versions?
bias	D: a personal and unreasoned distortion of judgment S: prejudice; twist; influence Q: What prejudices does the historical account have?
audience	D: a group of listeners, readers, or spectators S: spectators; listeners; conference Q: For whom is the document being written? Why is this important?
truth	D: the body of real things, events, and facts S: fact; certainty; reality Q: How do you know that this is the "true" history of the conquest

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TEACHER'S DIRECTIONS FOR STAGED EVENT

1. Identify two students to participate in an event that will take place at an agreed upon cue near the beginning of the class. Designate one person student B and the other student C.

2. As you prepare the two students to participate in staging the event, do not tell them too much about the activity. Therefore, they too will be surprised. Reassure both students that it is okay if the event doesn't go exactly as planned. If the staged activity does not go according to plans, the activity will still work. Just the history will change.

3. Begin the class by telling students that they are about to start a new unit on the conquest of Mexico. Review the key words: **perspective, interpretation, fact, omission, language, balance, bias, audience,** and **truth** with students. As a homework assignment, have them define the words and give some examples of synonyms. In class, write these words on sheets of newsprint and start discussing them with the students. Next, send two students on some kind of errand to the front office. Then resume the activity by asking students for more definitions and synonyms. Using Handout 2, *Key Words—Definitions, Synonyms, & Questions* as a guide, pose the questions listed with each word to help the students better understand these concepts.

4. At a specified cue (for example, when you scratch your right ear or perhaps when you call on student B to relate a story) have student B get out of his or her chair, walk to the chalkboard and write the words:

   "By 1500, the Aztec Empire stretched to almost every part of Mexico."

   Student B should sit down, wait for a few seconds and then return to the chalkboard to erase what was written.

5. While student B writes on the chalkboard, have student C get into an argument with you . The argument could be about anything. For instance, student C could say to you, "I don't like this lesson. I'm not learning anything." Then you could reply with shock and outrage, "I have never been so insulted. What do you mean that you don't like this lesson?" Student C could respond with, "Well, I just feel that I am wasting my time." Continue the exchange for a short time and then, as seriously as possible, state, "I have never been so insulted. If you feel that you can do better, then do so. I am leaving." Then walk out of the room.

6. Wait a few seconds, return to the room and then tell students to write about what just happened. Refer back to the Suggested Procedures for instructions on the rest of this activity.

DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENT B

Your role is to take place in a historical event. At a pre-arranged time (your teacher will tell you when) get out of your seat and write the following on the chalkboard:

"By 1500, the Aztec Empire stretched to almost every part of Mexico."

Either memorize this sentence or write it down on a small piece of paper. Try not to smile or look at your classmates. Pretend that everything is absolutely normal.

While you are writing on the chalkboard, another student will be performing a different activity, but don't pay attention to this. When you have finished writing the sentence, return to your seat. Next, acting as though you just remembered something, return to the chalkboard and erase what you just wrote. Then return to your seat again without smiling or looking at your classmates.

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DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENT C

Your role is to take place in a historical event. At a pre-arranged time another student will get out of his or her seat and go to the chalkboard. While this student begins to write on the chalkboard, you should disrupt the class by getting into an argument with your teacher. The argument could be about anything. You and your teacher should decide before class what you will argue about. For example, the argument could be about the lesson itself. Say to your teacher, " I don't like this lesson. I am not learning anything." Then your teacher might reply with mock shock and outrage, "I have never been so insulted. What do you mean that you don't like this lesson?" Then you could say, "Well, I just feel that I am wasting my time." Continue the exchange for a short time. Your teacher will end the conversation by walking out of the room.

It is impossible to make a mistake in this activity. So don't worry too much about what you are going to say. Of course, please avoid abusive language or profanity.

Introduction to Activities 1 & 2

THE SPANISH EMPIRE

. . . if one part of her heart said "Conquer!" the other part, remembering Seneca the Stoic, said, "Do not let yourself be conquered by anything but your soul." The stage was thus set for a tremendous clash of civilizations, a great epic, compassionate at times, bloody and ruthless at others, but always conflictive, as it both destroyed and created the culture of the New World.

—Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, page 89

Teacher Background

Spain, as we know it today, did not exist in the fifteenth century. With Ferdinand and Isabella, the vision of unity began to be a reality. The phrase "*un monarca, un imperio, y una espada*/one monarch, one empire, and one sword" reflects the sentiments behind the goals of Ferdinand and Isabella, and later of their grandson, Charles V. Historians such as Paul Kennedy in *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* refer to the "religious zeal" of the Habsburg monarchs in creating the Spanish empire. Hernando Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo were, according to Carlos Fuentes, "the bearers of a militant faith and a militant politics." With this faith and with a consuming drive to find gold, these men and others arrived in the Americas.

Spain consisted of Castile, Aragon, the principality of Catalonia, the kingdom of Valencia and other smaller states such as Galicia, Asturias and the Basque country. The unity of Spain is marked by a number of events, one being the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon.

The other major event of that period contributing to the creation of one Spain was the final push of the reconquest. For eight centuries, Christians, Muslims and Jews lived together on the Iberian peninsula. Granada was the last bastion of Islamic rule on the peninsula. The peoples of Granada had been living in coexistence by paying a tribute to Castile. Isabella and Ferdinand convinced the church to contribute to a crusade to push Islam out of the peninsula completely. Religious and economic considerations went into this decision since Granada was a rich silk producing area. Granada surrendered in January 1492.

The dream of a Christian empire was further realized with Charles V. Ferdinand and Isabella's daughter Joan married Philip, son of Maximilian I. The eldest son of this union, Charles became Charles I of Spain at the age of 16 and then Emperor Charles V, ruler of the Habsburg lands in Austria.

So under these auspices, men such as Cortés and Castillo sailed to the Americas. Cortés wrote five letters from Mexico to the Emperor Charles V describing the first contacts, the capture of the Aztec capital, later the expedition to Honduras, and the organization of the Spanish empire in the Americas. Castillo wrote the *History of the Conquest of New Spain* as a

introduction to activities 1 & 2

reaction to the publication of a book by someone who had never been to Mexico.

Outline of Activities

Activity One: The Letters of Hernando Cortés gives the students the opportunity to explore the Spanish point of view of the meeting of Cortés and Montezuma. Cortés describes how he saw the Aztecs in these excerpts from his letters to Emperor Charles V. *Activity Two: Bernal Díaz del Castillo: The "True" History of the Conquest* presents a description of the battle between the Aztecs and the Spaniards.

Note to the Teacher

When the groups are ready to present their tasks to the entire class, consider debriefing the groups in the following order. The group presenting *Activity One* should go first followed by the group presenting *Activity Three*. Then *Activity Two* and *Activity Four* should be debriefed together. The purpose of presenting the activities in this order is to juxtapose the Aztec and the Spanish perspectives of the events. In the debriefing, have students compare and contrast the two perspectives. Ask students questions about **omission** and **factual content**. What is missing in one version or the other? Have students analyze the pieces for **balance**.

Extension Questions

- What motivates people to write history? Why is history important?
- How balanced is this version of the meeting of Montezuma and Cortés? How balanced is this version of the battle between the Aztecs and the Spanish?
- What factors would influence a person's perspective of an event?
- How is a person's point of view shaped?
- What questions would you ask when you read the history of a particular event?

Related Topics

- Doña Marina or La Malinche
- Europe in 1492
- Inventions that changed how people traveled
- Other "explorers" to the Americas
- Definition of words: Indians, West Indies, Pre-Colombian
- Conquest or Invasion?

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THE LETTERS OF HERNANDO CORTÉS
ACTIVITY CARD

Hernando Cortés was born in 1485 in Spain. He had his first opportunity to sail to the West Indies in 1504 at the age of 19. He wanted to sail to Mexico to be part of the expedition that was to explore and conquer Mexico. Cortés along with 500 men, sixteen horses, and eleven ships landed on the coast of Mexico on April 22, 1519. The Aztecs surrendered to him on August 13, 1521.

During the years between the time he landed and when the Aztecs surrendered, Cortés wrote five letters to the Emperor Charles V. These letters were like reports to his employer of what was happening during the expedition. The first letter was written in July 1519. And the last letter was written in September 1526. Cortés' letters were used to tell the history of the conquest in many textbooks.

The following Key Words and Questions will help your group:

- **Perspective:** From whose point of view is this being written?
- **Language:** How are the places and the people described? How are customs described? What words are used? What do these words mean to you?
- **Audience**: For whom is the document being written? Why is this important?

Read the excerpts from the letters of Hernando Cortés. Answer the following questions with your group:

1. How does Cortés describe the Aztecs? What words are used to describe the Aztecs? How do you think he feels about the Aztecs?
2. How does Cortés describe Montezuma? How does he treat him?
3. For whom is Cortés writing these letters? How does the **audience** affect what he writes?
4. How would a letter to the Emperor be different from a letter to a friend?
5. If you were an historian, what additional information would you need to write the history of this event?

GROUP TASK

Using the information presented in the letters, create a play about a meeting of Cortés and the Emperor Charles V. Imagine that Cortés had returned to Spain to meet with the Emperor to inform him about the expedition. You may want to include other roles such as assistants and soldiers.

The Letters of Hernando Cortés
Resource Card 1

First Letter sent to the Emperor Charles V on the 10th of July, 1519.

We have good reason to believe that your Majesties have been informed by the letters of Diego Velasquez, Admiral Deputy in the Island of Cuba, of the new land that was discovered some two or more years ago in these parts. . . We shall therefore deal with this land from its first discovery up to its present state, that your Majesties may know what land it is, the people which possess it, their manner of living, rites and ceremonies, religious beliefs, what fruit your Majesties may hope to receive from it.

The natives who inhabit the island of Cozumel and the land of Yucatán are of middle height, and well proportioned, except that in our district they disfigure their faces in various ways, some piercing the ears, introducing large and extremely ugly ornaments, others the lower part of the nose and upper lip in which they insert large circular stones having the appearance of mirrors. They wear as clothes a kind of highly decorated shawl, the men wear breech clouts, and on the top half of the body cloaks finely worked and painted.

In addition they have their mosques, and in them are the idols which they worship. And always on the day before they are to begin some important enterprise they burn incense in these temples and sometimes even sacrifice their own persons, some cutting out their tongues, others their ears, still others slicing their bodies with knives in order to offer to their idols the blood which flows from their wounds. One horrible and abominable custom they have which should certainly be punished and which we have seen in no other part and that is that whenever they wish to beg anything of their idols, they take large numbers of boys and girls and even of grown men and women and tear out their heart and bowels while still alive, burning them in the presence of those idols. Your Majesties may therefore perceive whether it will be pleasing to God if by means of and under the protection of your royal Majesties these peoples are introduced into and instructed in the holy Catholic Faith.

The Second Despatch of Hernando Cortés to the Emperor on the 30th of October, 1520.

And while speaking to Montezuma I took off a necklace of pearls and crystals which I was wearing and threw it round his neck; whereupon having proceeded some little way up the street a servant of his came back to me with two necklaces wrapped up in a napkin made from the shells of sea snails, which are much prized by them; and from each necklace hung eight prawns fashioned very beautifully in gold some six inches in length.

I considered it essential both from my observation of the city and the rest of the land that its ruler should be in my power and no longer entirely free; to the end that he might in no way change his will and intent to serve your Majesty, more especially as we Spaniards are somewhat intolerant and stiff-necked and should he get across with us he would be powerful enough to do us great damage.

When I recognized the very real desire that he had to serve your Majesty, I requested him, that I might give our Majesty a more minute account of this land, to show me the mine from which he drew his gold, which he declared himself very ready and willing to do. Some days after this formal acknowledgment of service to your Majesty I was speaking to Montezuma and told him that your Majesty was in need of gold for certain works which he had in hand; I asked to send some of his own men, to whom I would add an equal number of Spaniards, to the estates and house of those nobles who had publicly offered themselves vassals of your Majesty.

Reprinted with permission from *Five Letters of Cortés to the Emperor*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 1969.

THE LETTERS OF HERNANDO CORTÉS
INDIVIDUAL REPORT

1. How would you describe Cortés's first impressions of the Aztecs?

2. If you were an historian, what other information would you want to look at before writing the history of the meeting of Cortés and Montezuma?

Bernal Díaz Del Castillo: The "True" History of the Conquest Activity Card

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was born in Spain in 1492. He participated in two of first expeditions to Mexico by the Spanish. Then he became one of Cortés's soldiers and was part of the expedition that Cortés led to conquer Mexico.

Many years after, he read a book that had been written by a Spanish historian and said that the writer did not speak the truth 'neither in the beginning, nor the middle, nor the end.' He decided to write his own version which he called *History of the Conquest of New Spain*. He felt that it was the "true" history since he had been part of the Cortés expedition.

Your group will be reading parts of "Siege and Capture of Mexico," the last chapter of *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*.

The Key Words and Questions for this activity are:

- **Perspective:** From whose point of view was this written?
- **Interpretation:** Who is writing? What is a fact? What is perspective?
- **Truth:** How do you know that this is the "true" history of the conquest?

1. How do you know whether or not this is the "true" history of the conquest?
2. How do you think writing this account several years later affected what Castillo included?
3. How did Bernal Díaz del Castillo gather information for his account?
4. How does Castillo describe the battle between the Aztecs and the Spanish? How did the Spanish defeat the Aztecs?
5. As an historian, what kinds of questions would you want to ask Bernal Díaz del Castillo to discover the "true" history of the event?

Group Task

Your group will stage a talk show with Bernal Díaz del Castillo as the main guest. He will be presenting his account of the conquest of Mexico. Other roles that you can include are the talk show host, and members of the audience. You could also include other people such as Cortés, Montezuma, or other Aztecs.

Bernal Díaz del Castillo: The "True History of the Conquest Resource Card 1

When Cortés decided that on the second day of the Feast of the Holy Spirit a review should be held in the great courts of Texcoco. Eighty-four horsemen were present, and six hundred and fifty soldiers with sword and shield and many with lances, and from these were chosen crews to man the thirteen launches.

Let us leave the daily battles, and those others fought by Cortés, and say what an advantage we had gained by preventing food and water getting to the enemy. To interrupt these supplies, it was agreed between our three camps that two launches should patrol the lake by night and destroy all the canoes they could.

I will go on to speak of the severe fighting that was all the time going on in Cortés' camp. For he ordered that all houses should be pulled down and burnt and the bridged channels filled up. Now when the Mexicans saw us leveling the houses and filling up the bridges they decided on another way of fighting. They would lift a bridge, they dug many pits, they also drove in many stakes where our launches would run on them. One Sunday morning squadrons of warriors fell on us from three directions. They forced us to cross at where the water was very deep and they had dug many pits. We swam or leapt through the water, and nearly all our men fell into these pits.

We were to advance with all possible strength from all three camps, horsemen, crossbow men, musketeers and soldiers and push forward into the great market square of Tlatelolco.

To return to our story, as we advanced from all three camps into the city, we came to the pool from which they drew the brackish water I have spoken of, and destroyed it so that they should make no more use of it. We could now move more freely along all the streets we had captured, for they had been leveled and our horsemen had freedom of maneuver. The message that they carried to Guatemoc was that Cortés had a great regard for him as a close relative and that he would be sorry if that great city was totally destroyed. To avoid the daily slaughter of its inhabitants he begged Guatemoc to make peace.

Let me say that Pedro de Alvarado's men advanced fighting till they reached Tlatelolco. There were so many Mexicans guarding their idols and tall shrines and they had raised so many barricades that it took us quite two hours before we could capture them. We climbed to the top, set the shrines on fire, burnt the idols, and planted our banners there.

Everyone agreed that all the gold and silver and jewels in Mexico should be collected together. But this seems to have amounted to very little. We captains and soldiers were all somewhat sad when we saw how little gold there was and how poor and mean our shares would be. Many interested readers have asked me why the true Conquistadors who won New Spain and the great and strong city of Mexico did not stay to settle, but went on to other provinces. Learning from Montezuma's account books the names of the places which sent him tributes of gold, and where the mines and chocolate and cotton cloths were to be found, we decided to go to these places. We realized that there were no gold or mines or cotton in the towns around Mexico, only a lot of maize and the maguey plantations from which they obtained their wine. For this reason we thought of it as a poor land, and went off to colonize other provinces.

Reprinted with permission from *The History of the Conquest of New Spain* by Bernal Díaz del Castillo. Translated by J.M. Cohen. London: Penguin Books Ltd. 1963.

BERNAL DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO: THE "TRUE" HISTORY OF THE CONQUEST INDIVIDUAL REPORT

1. How does Bernal Díaz del Castillo describe the defeat of the Aztecs?

2. In writing about the history of an event, how would you go about collecting information?

Introduction to Activities 3 & 4

THE AZTEC EMPIRE

Suddenly, all at once, the cries and the drums cease. Gods and men have been defeated. With the god's death, time has died. With the men's death, the city has died. This warrior city, she of the white willows and white rushes, has died fighting as she lived. No more will conquered princes of all the regions come in boats through the mist to pay her tribute. A stunning silence reigns. And the rain begins to fall. Thunder and lightning fill the sky, and it rains all through the night. The gold is piled into huge baskets. Gold of shields and insignia of war, gold of the masks of gods, lip and ear pendants, ornaments, lockets. The gold is weighed and the prisoners priced. *One of these wretches is hardly worth two handfuls of corn. . .* The soldiers gather to play dice and cards. Fire burns the soles of Emperor Cuauhtemoc's feet, anointed with oil, while the world is silent, and it rains.

—Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, page 71

Teacher Background

Miguel León-Portilla, one of the foremost scholars of Nahuatl studies, makes the distinction between the Mexicas and the other Nahuatl-speaking peoples. Nahuatl was the language of the people who lived in the central valley of Mexico. The use of the name "Aztecs" is commonly substituted for Mexicas though, according to Nahuatl historians such as León-Portilla, this substitution is inaccurate. I chose to maintain the name Aztecs after consulting with teachers and with Social Studies frameworks which cite the study of the Aztec civilization. But nonetheless, this is an important point to discuss with the students.

What information was written about the Aztec people, the culture, and their empire was limited for many years to what the Spanish had written or the anthropological studies of the ruins of temples, palaces, and of artifacts. The study of the Nahuatl language and the translations of ancient documents have increased the level of information about these people. The Nahuatl culture had a mode of writing—the Nahuas' book of years showed how significant events were recorded.

The most well-known documents, either written or painted, which best describe the coming of the Spaniards and subsequent events are the Florentine Codex, the Manuscript 22, the Songs of Sorrow, and Lienzo de Tlaxcala. *Activity Three: The Florentine Codex* uses excerpts from this document to show the Aztec point of view of the meeting of Cortés and Montezuma. In addition, reproductions of the paintings supplement the reading. *Activity Four: Songs of Sorrow* presents two "songs of sorrow" written by Aztec poets after the conquest.

The period between 1427 and 1521 is called the "hundred years of the People of the Sun." The creation of the Aztec empire is credited to a political advisor known as Tlacaelel. One of the most significant of his accomplishments was the idea that Huitzilopochtli was the supreme deity and that this God required human sacrifices to maintain a balance. Tlacaelel was responsible for land distribution, waging war on regions as far as Guatemala, and "rewriting" the history of the Aztecs using cultural and religious elements from other groups.

introduction to activities 3 & 4

At the base of Aztec life was religion. Keeping the sun alive is an idea that can be traced back to the Toltecs. The Aztecs believed that in the early days of creation, the Gods sacrificed themselves. So since the Gods gave their blood, men should do the same. The sun was the lifeblood of men, therefore the sun needed the blood of men. Human sacrifice became part of religious activities of the Aztecs and in order to have victims for these sacrifices they waged war against neighboring states.

The Aztecs were nomadic and had arrived in the Valley in the middle of the thirteenth century. The legend says that the God spoke through a priest telling them to move and find a place to live. They would know they had found the right place when they found an eagle on top of a cactus. This would be the site of the greatest empire. This place turned out to be on Lake Texcoco. The Aztecs built the great city of Tenochtitlan. Since they inhabited a small island in a lake, they did not have room to grow what they needed, so they made canals and used the mud to pack it into a solid mass to form an area where they could plant seeds.

The Aztecs were warlike but their diplomatic abilities are also worthy of mention. Alliances were built with many states as far away as Guatemala. The social and moral codes of Aztec society were very strict. Punishment was severe for acts of immorality such as drunkenness, adultery, and prostitution. All children were registered and school was obligatory.

Outline of Activities

Activity Three: The Florentine Codex presents excerpts from Fray Bernadino Sahagún's collection of writings by Aztec survivors. In this activity, the students read a passage describing the meeting of Montezuma and Cortés. As a group they attempt to portray this interpretation using pictographs. In *Activity Four: Songs of Sorrow* the students read two poems and analyze paintings which describe the defeat of the Aztecs. The group then makes a sculpture to express the sentiments of the Aztecs.

Extension Questions

As student rotate through rounds of these activities and as they become more familiar with the different sources, ask them questions that encourage them to compare and contrast the sources.

- What is missing from one source that is included in another?
- What is the tone or feeling of one account? Is this tone the same in another account?
- How are you affected by the different accounts? By the pictures? By the poems? By the letters?
- How is reading a poem different from reading a letter?
- How are poetry and art important in telling the history of an event?

Related Topics

- The Aztec Calendar Stone
- The Building of Tenochtitlán

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introduction to activities 3 & 4

- How do anthropologist know about the Aztec culture?
- The beliefs of the Aztecs
- Other cultures of Mexico in the 1500s

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THE FLORENTINE CODEX ACTIVITY CARD

The first version of the Florentine Codex was written in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, by the students of Fray Bernadino de Sahagún. Fray Bernadino was a Spanish monk who came to Mexico in 1529. His job was to convert the natives to the Catholic religion. He learned Nahuatl to better communicate with the people. Unfortunately, the first version of this collection was lost. Fray Bernadino then wrote a summary in Spanish of what had been written. He later wrote another in Nahuatl to correct some things.

Most of the ancient books of the Aztecs were burned by the Spanish. The Aztecs painted using figures and images to record what their ancestors had done, and to record what they believed. The reason that the Spanish burned these books was to keep the Aztecs from reading about their own religion and to make it easier to convert them to Catholicism.

You will be reading parts of the Florentine Codex which describe the meeting between Cortés and Montezuma. In addition, you will be looking at some reproductions of pictographs drawn by the Aztecs. Pictographs are picture writings.

The Key Words and Questions for this activity are:

- **Perspective:** From whose point of view is this being written?
- **Interpretation:** Who is writing? What is fact? What is perspective?
- **Language**: How are the events, place, and people described? What words are used to describe them?

1. How does Montezuma greet Cortés? What does he say to him?
2. How is this meeting described? How are the Spanish described? What words are used to describe the Spanish? What do the informants who wrote this say that the Spanish wanted?
3. How do the artists of the pictures portray the meeting of the Aztecs and the Spanish? Describe the Aztecs and the Spanish from the pictures. What are they doing in the pictures?
4. As a historian how would you decide what kind of information to include?

GROUP TASK

Songs are used around the world to describe love stories, historical events, or unusual incidents. Think about the words of some of your favorite songs. As a group write a song describing what is written in the Florentine Codex.

THE FLORENTINE CODEX
RESOURCE CARD 1

Montezuma Goes Out to Meet Cortés

The Spaniards arrived in Xoloco, near the entrance to Tenochtitlan. That was the end of the march, for they had reached their goal.

Montezuma now arrayed himself in his finery, preparing to go out to meet them. The other great princes also adorned their persons, as did the nobles and their chieftains and knights. They all went out together to meet the strangers.

They brought trays heaped with the finest flowers—the flower that resembles a shield; the flower shaped like a heart; in the center, the flower with the sweetest aroma; and the fragrant yellow flower, the most precious of all. They also brought garlands of flowers, and ornaments for the breast, and necklaces of gold, necklaces hung with rich stones, necklaces fashioned in the petatillo style.

Thus Montezuma went out to meet them, there in Huitzillan. He presented many gifts to the Captain and his commanders, those who had come to make war. He showered gifts upon them and hung flowers around their necks; he gave them necklaces of flowers and bands of flowers to adorn their breast; he set garlands of flowers upon their heads. Then he hung gold necklaces around their necks and gave them presents of every sort as gifts of welcome.

Speeches of Montezuma and Cortés

When Montezuma had given necklaces to each one, Cortés asked him: "Are you Montezuma? Are you the king? Is it true that you are the king Montezuma? And the king said: "Yes, I am Montezuma." Then he stood up to welcome Cortés; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: "our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, to sit under its canopy. This was foretold by the kings who governed your city, and now has taken place. You have come back to us; you have come down from the sky. Rest now, and take possession of your royal houses. Welcome to your land, my lords!"

The Spaniards Take Possession of the City

When the Spaniards entered the Royal House, they placed Montezuma under guard and kept him under their vigilance.

Then the Spaniards fired one of their cannons, and this caused great confusion

THE FLORENTINE CODEX
RESOURCE CARD 1

in the city. The people scattered in every direction; they fled without rhyme or reason; they ran off as if they were being pursued.

The Spaniards Reveal their Greed

When the Spaniards were installed in the palace, they asked Montezuma about the city's resources and reserves and about the warriors' ensigns and shields. They questioned closely and then demanded gold.

Montezuma guided them to it. They surrounded him and crowded close with their weapons. He walked in the center, while they formed a circle around him.

When they arrived at the treasure house called Teucalco, the riches of gold and feathers were brought out to them: ornaments made of quetzal feathers, richly worked shields, disks of gold, the necklaces of the idols, gold nose plugs, gold bracelets and crowns.

The Spaniards immediately stripped the feathers from the gold shields and ensigns. They gathered all the gold into a great mound and set fire to everything else, regardless of its value. Then they melted down the gold into ingots. The Spaniards searched through the whole treasure house, questioning and quarreling, and seized every object they thought was beautiful.

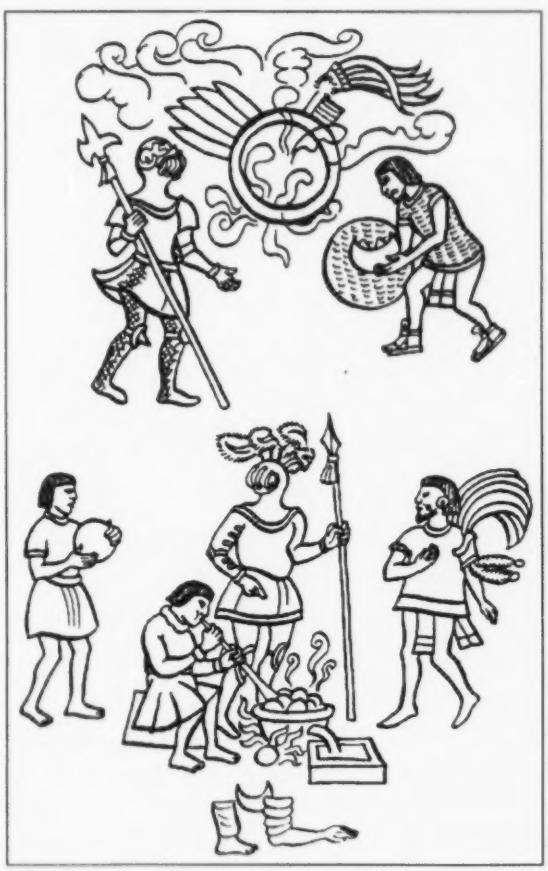
The Seizure of Montezuma's Treasures

Next day they went to Montezuma's storehouse, in the place called Totocalco, where his personal treasures were kept. The Spaniards grinned like little beasts and patted each other with delight.

When they entered the hall of treasures, it was as if they had arrived in Paradise. They searched everything; they were slaves to their own greed.

The Mexicans were too frightened to approach. They were crushed by terror and would not risk coming forward. They shied away as if the Spaniards were wild beasts, as if the hour were midnight on the blackest night of the year. Yet they did not abandon the Spaniards to hunger and thirst. They brought them whatever they needed, but shook with fear as they did so.

Text and images reproduced by permission of Beacon Press, Boston from *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico.* by Miguel Leon-Portilla. ©1962, 1990 by Beacon Press.



THE FLORENTINE CODEX
INDIVIDUAL REPORT

1. How do the Aztecs describe the meeting between Montezuma and Cortés?

2. As a historian, what additional information would you want to write the history of this meeting?

SONGS OF SORROW
ACTIVITY CARD

Songs, music, dance, and performances were part of the lives of the ancient people of Mexico. Images of the dances and performances can be seen in the mural paintings and in the pictographs that were saved. Pictographs are picture writings using pictures to tell a story.

The poems were written by poets after the Conquest of the Aztecs, probably in the year 1523. These are called the "songs of sorrow." These songs describe the final days of the city of Tenochtitlán, the capital city of the Aztecs, and the grief the Aztecs felt about their defeat.

The paintings show the traditional way the Aztecs wrote history. Some collections of these paintings are used to tell the other side of the history of the conquest.

The Key Words and Questions for this activity are:

Perspective: From whose point of view is this being written?

Language: How are events, places, and people described? What words are used to describe them?

Interpretation: Who is writing? What is fact? What is perspective?

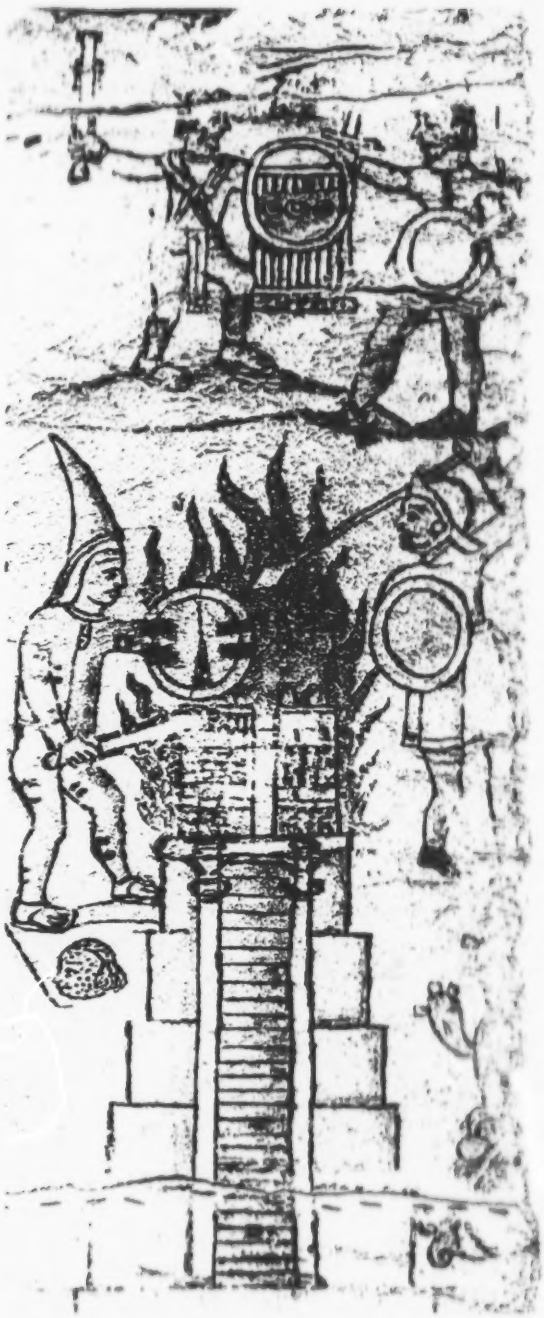
Read the poems out loud and look at the paintings. With your group answer the following questions:

1. How do these poets describe the fall of the city? What words do they use to describe what happened? What words are used to describe the conquest?
2. How can poems be used to tell the history of an event? What kinds of information do poems and pictures tell?
3. What feelings do you have reading these poems and looking at these paintings?
4. What additional information do you need to know the history of the event?

GROUP TASK

The Aztecs were known for sculptures of people. As a group produce a three-dimensional sculpture expressing the feelings of the people who wrote the poems and painted the pictures. Show how the Aztecs would want this event to be remembered by future generations. Include as part of the sculpture how the Aztecs felt about the fall of their city.

SONGS OF SORROW
RESOURCE CARD 1



Codex Fragment from Mexico: A History in Art by Bradley Smith. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968

The Fall of Tenochtitlan

Our cries of grief rise up
and our tears rain down,
for Tlatelolco is lost.
The Aztecs are fleeing across the lake;
they are running away like women.

How can we save our homes, my people?
The Aztecs are deserting the city:
the city is in flames, and all
is darkness and destruction.

Weep, my people:
know that with these disasters
we have lost the Mexican nation.
The water has turned bitter, our food is bitter!
These are the acts of the Giver of Life. . .

Poem reproduced by permission of Beacon Press, Boston from *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* by Miguel Leon-Portilla. ©1969, 1990 by Beacon Press.

SONGS OF SORROW
RESOURCE CARD 2

Broken spears lie in the roads; we have torn our hair in our grief. The houses are roofless now, and their walls are red with blood.

Worms are swarming in the streets and plazas, and the walls are splattered with gore. The water has turned red, as if it were dyed, and when we drink it, it has the taste of brine.

We have pounded our hands in despair against the adobe walls, for our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead. The shields of our warriors were its defense, but they could not save it.

We have chewed dry twigs and salt grasses; we have filled our mouths with dust and bits of adobe; we have eaten lizards, rats and worms. . .

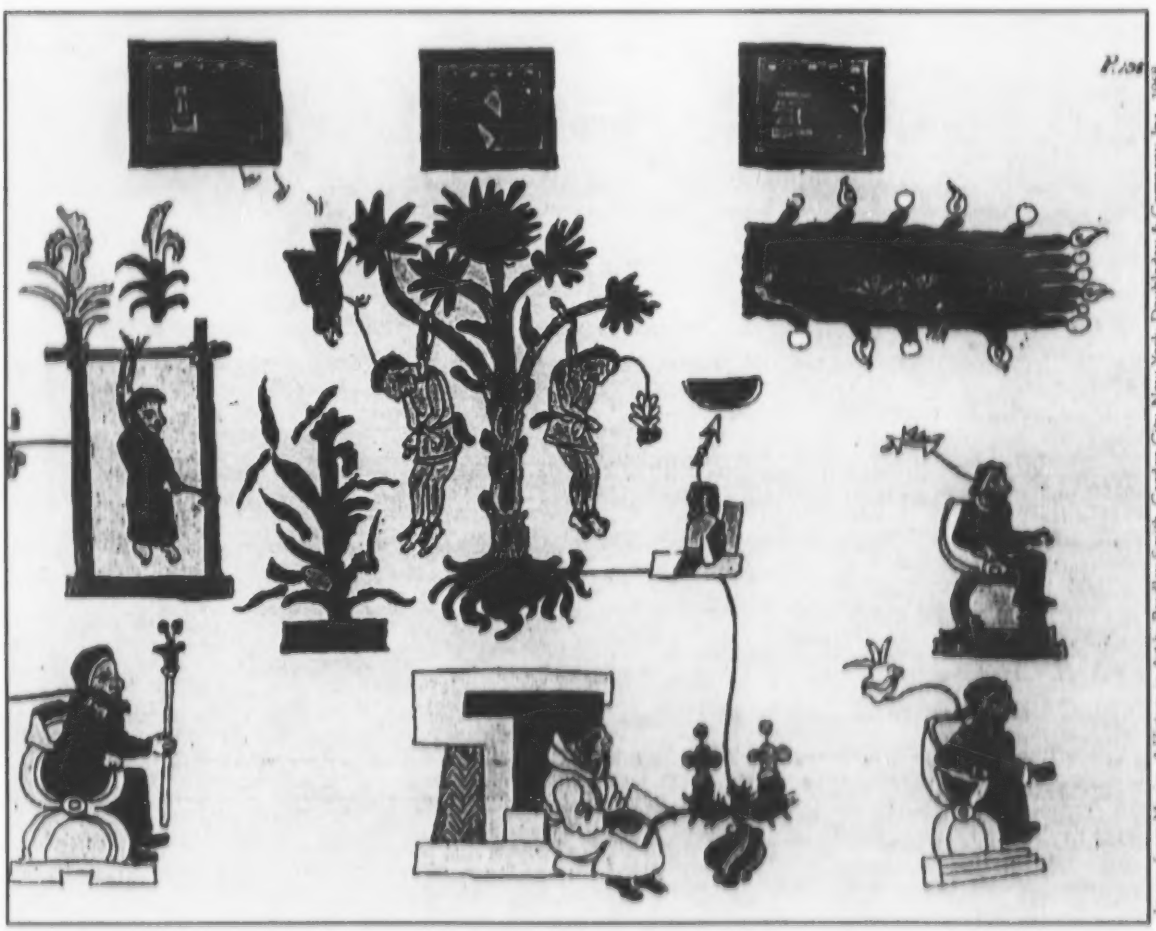


Image from *Mexico: A History in Art* by Bradley Smith. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968.

Poem reproduced by permission of Beacon Press, Boston from *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* by Miguel Leon-Portilla. ©1969, 1990 by Beacon Press.

SONGS OF SORROW
INDIVIDUAL REPORT

1. How do the Aztec poets and painters describe the conquest of Mexico?

2. How could historians use poems and paintings to tell the history of an event?

Introduction to Activities 5 & 6

RETELLING OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

Thus, the masks of Mexico are a record of its peoples, cultures, religions, and history.
—Donald Cordry, *Mexican Masks*, page 4

Teacher Background

Contemporary art such as the murals of Diego Rivera and folk rituals such as the *Danza de la Conquista*/Dance of the Conquest also "tell" the history of an event, of a people, or a place. In the last two activities, the students will have the opportunity to see different ways history is transmitted. The students will examine how each method of recording and transmitting history has a different goal and effect.

The students will have the opportunity to see how a historical event is not only written about but also communicated through art and dance. The transmission of history can take on forms other than writing. In cultures where oral traditions are important, story telling, dance, and folkart will serve as the vehicles for learning about history. Why are these methods important? How is the oral transmission of history different from the written? How has time treated the description of the conquest?

The oral traditions of many of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America continue. Through these traditions the story of the conquest is still being told. Dance, mask making, and story telling are important aspects of the culture of the indigenous people of Mexico. For many people in rural areas, the world of books does not exist, so these dances affirm the people's version of history.

The Conquest is the most popular historical event used in the dances and all the characters of the conquest are represented. *La Danza de la Conquista*/The Dance of the Conquest is also known by other names—Azteca Dance, Dance of the Concheros, Chichimec Dance, Plume Dance are some of the variations. The Dance of the Conquest is usually performed on a village's saint day. The dance is from the Indian point of view and is presented as a tragedy. Montezuma, La Malinche, Cortés, warriors, and soldiers from both sides are the usual characters.

The dancers are chosen to participate in the dances by a committee. Everyone has a part in the festivities from preparing food to making the costumes. Scripts such as the excerpt presented in Resource Card 1 are memorized. In most of the dances, there is a struggle between two forces—sun and moon, good and evil, the Aztecs and the Spanish. It is this struggle that creates a balance. This concept comes from the time of the Aztecs and can be found in most of the dances.

Outline of Activities

In *Activity Five: Danza de la Conquista*, the group analyzes pictures of the *Danza de la Conquista*/Dance of the Conquest. In addition, the students read an excerpt of a dialogue between Montezuma and Cortés during the dance. The students then make up a dance which will transmit

information about a historical event to future generations. In *Activity Six: The Aztecs and the Spanish in Diego Rivera's Murals*, the students look at details from two murals painted by Rivera. The students then paint their own mural of their intepretation of the conquest.

Extension Questions

In the debriefing of the presentations, encourage students to make comparison between the information presented in each of the performances. Ask students questions regarding the point of view of a particular version.

- How is history transmitted in informal ways in your community?
- Describe how dance, art, and story telling are important ways that history is passed on from one generation to another.
- How does television affect the way history is transmitted? Describe other "modern" innovations that influence the "writing" or "telling" of history.
- How will history be "written" or "told" in the future?

Reference Materials

Cordry, Donald. *Mexican Masks*. Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1980.

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Martí, Samuel and Kurath, Gertrude Prokosch. *Dances of Anáhuac: The Choregraphy and Music of Precortesian Dances*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1964.

Warman, Arturo. *La Danza de Moros y Cristianos*. Mexico, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1972.

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Danza de la Conquista Activity Card

Throughout the year, the ancient peoples of Mexico had ceremonies for rain, for the harvest of corn, for victories in war, and for flowers. These ceremonies included dances, festivals, food, and religious acts. Dance was an important part of each ceremony. From ancient drawings and sculptures, we know that the Aztecs had elaborate dances using costumes, masks, and other props.

Dances are still performed in villages throughout Mexico today during celebrations. A village committee will appoint people to be part of the dance, to help with the food, or to make the costumes. *La Danza de la Conquista*/The Dance of the Conquest is the most popular and important historical dance. The Dance is a battle between two forces: the Aztecs and the Spanish. Most of the dances show some kind of struggle between two forces—good and evil, night and day, sun and moon. The dance performance also includes speeches which are memorized by the dancers. The dances are taught to the children by their elders.

The dancers in these pictures from the village of San Juan de Ocotán in Mexico are: Montezuma (the king of the Aztecs), Cortés (the Spanish conqueror), and an Aztec girl.

The Key Words and Questions for this activity are:

Perspective: From whose point of view is the story of the dance being told?
Interpretation: Who is telling the story? What is fact? What is perspective?

Look at the pictures of the dance. Read the conversation between Cortés and Montezuma. With your group answer the following questions:

1. Story telling, ritual dances, and songs are ways that history is passed from one generation to another. How is this type of history important? How is it different from written history?
2. Why do you think this dance has survived so many years? How is the dance important to the people?
3. Describe some ways that "history" is passed from one generation to another.

Group Task

In some cultures, telling stories is a way in which the history of one event is passed on from one generation to another. Or in some places in Mexico, adults teach children how to dance the Dance of the Conquest. With your group make up a dance which will tell future generations about a historical event.

Danza de la Conquista
Resource Card 1

Cortés:

He is so eternal this God, that if you want to see his glory forget the laws you have and see a true God.

Montezuma:

Why then do you bring your sword?

Cortés:

Because if you are reluctant and do not allow what I want, with it [the sword] you will know that this God is true.

From a speech during the Danza de la Conquista, Cuilapan, Oaxaca.

Photographs by Susan Cashion

Dancer in Aztec costume from San Juan de Ocotán, Mexico

Danza de la Conquista
Resource Card 2

Photographs by Susan Cashion

Dancer in Spanish Conquistador costume from San Juan de Ocotán, Mexico

Danza de la Conquista
Resource Card 3

Photographs by Susan Cashion

Dancer in Aztec costume from San Juan de Ocotán, Mexico

Danza de la Conquista
Individual Report

1. How can dance describe a historical event?

2. Describe non-written ways in which history is communicated.

THE AZTECS AND THE SPANISH IN DIEGO RIVERA'S MURALS ACTIVITY CARD

Diego Rivera was a Mexican artist best known for his large murals painted on the walls of buildings. One of the most well known murals, called "The Great City of Tenochtitlan" is at the National Palace in Mexico City. When Rivera painted this mural, he was very concerned with historical details. He wrote "I took grave care to authenticate every detail by exact research because I wanted to leave no opening to anyone to discredit the murals as a whole by the charge that any detail was a fabrication." The mural "The History of Mexico" was painted by both Rivera and another muralist named José Clemente Orozco.

The Key Words and Questions for this activity are:

Perspective: From whose point of view is the mural painted?
Interpretation: Who is painting? What is fact? What is perspective?

With your group answer the following questions:

1. How does the artist paint the Aztecs? How does he portray their city, their dress, and their customs?
2. How does the artist paint the Spanish? How does he portray their actions?
3. What message do you think Rivera wanted to tell in these murals?
4. How are murals and other kinds of art important in retelling history?

GROUP TASK

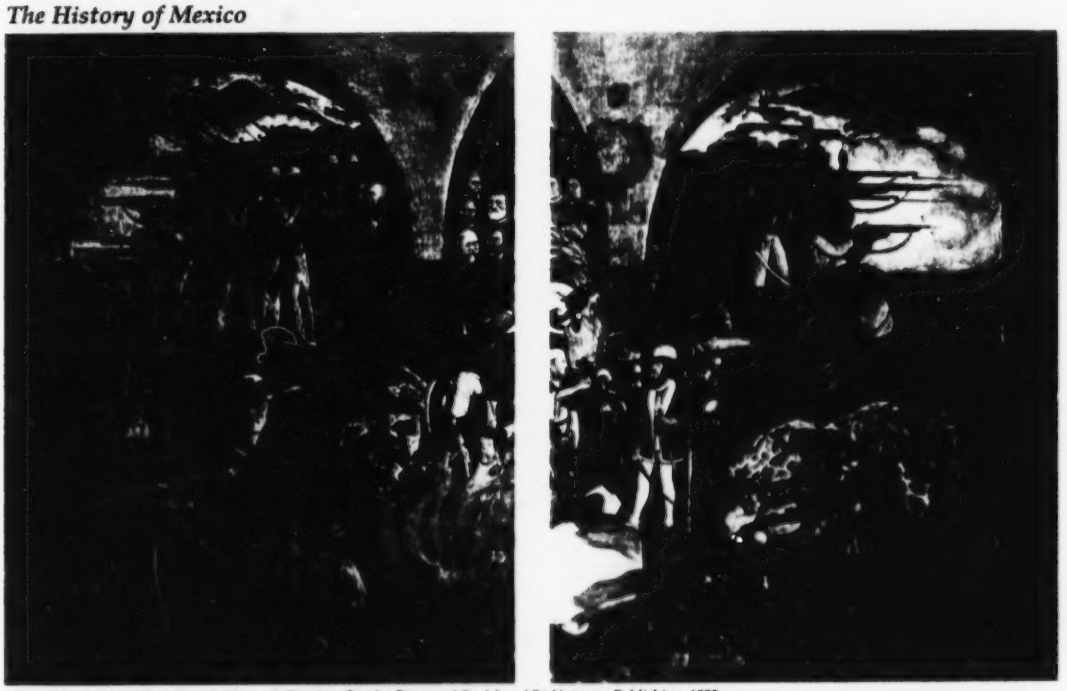
As a group create a mural of the meeting of the Aztecs and the Spanish.

The Aztecs and The Spanish in Diego Rivera's Murals
Resource Card 1

The Great City of Tenochtitlan

From *Mural Painting of the Mexican Revolution*. Text by Carlos Pellicer and Rafael Carrillo Azpeitia. Mexico, D.F.: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana. 1992.

The History of Mexico



From *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, & Siqueiros*. Text by Desmond Rochfort. NY: Universe Publishing. 1993.

THE AZTECS AND THE SPANISH IN DIEGO RIVERA'S MURALS INDIVIDUAL REPORT

1. How are the Aztecs portrayed in the murals of Diego Rivera?

2. As an historian, how could these murals be used in the description of the Aztecs?

Closure Activity

MOMENTS IN HISTORY

Overview

The *Closure Activity* will give the students the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned about the Aztecs and the Spanish. In addition, they will further explore how history is constructed and some of the factors that influence the writing of history. The class will be divided into groups of performers and groups of observers. The groups of performers will prepare skits enacting three moments in the history of the Aztecs and the Spanish. The different groups of historians observing the skits will analyze the information presented in the skits, the perspectives taken by the performers, and ask questions to gather more information. The students will later analyze the accounts written by the historians.

Objectives

- to give the students the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned
- to demonstrate how point of view is shaped
- to have students analyze how interpretation influences point of view
- to have students analyze how labels influence point of view

Time

One to two class periods

Materials

For Performers

- Handout 3, *Group 1 Performers Activity Card*
- Handout 4, *Group 2 Performers Activity Card*
- Handout 5, *Group 3 Performers Activity Card*
- costumes and props (if available)

For Historians

- Handout 6, *Aztec Historians Activity Card*
- Handout 7, *Aztec Historians Observation Sheet*
- Handout 8, *Spanish Historians Activity Card*
- Handout 9, *Spanish Historians Observation Sheet*
- Handout 10, *"Fish Bowl" Historians Activity Sheet*
- Handout 11, *"Fish Bowl" Historians Observation Sheet*
- Handout 12, *Optional Group Historians Activity Card*
- Handout 13, *Optional Group Historians Observation Sheet*
- Teacher's Guide 4, *Nametags*
- timer
- copies of the *Activity* and *Resource Cards* used in the previous activities to serve as reference for the students

Teacher Preparation

1. Divide the class into six or seven groups depending on the numbers of students in the class. Some of the students will be performers and some will be historians.

closure activity

2. At least three groups of performers are needed. There are three *Activity Cards* included for the groups of performers. If you have a large class, you can add a fourth group of performers by assigning two groups the same scene. Each group will interpret the scene differently so do not worry about repetition.

3. At least three groups of historians are needed: Aztec Historians, Spanish Historians, and "Fish Bowl" Historians. Again, if your class is large, you can add a fourth group of historians and assign them to one of the groups of performers. Since the labeling of each group of historians is an important aspect of the activity, give this group a name or allow the students to create their own name. Handouts 12 and 13 are provided for this optional group.

4. Teacher's Guide 4, *Nametags* contain nametags for the performers and the historians. Make copies so that there are enough nametags for each student in all the groups. The nametags simply say performer or historian—encourage students to add their group's identification.

About Fish Bowl

Fish Bowl is a strategy in which a group of participants observe the actions of another group. The purpose of using this strategy is to illustrate a point to the performers and historians. In this case, the fish bowl technique will further illustrate the guiding concept of *Visions of History*: how is history constructed. Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate what content they have learned, but also how they have understood the principal concept of the unit. One of the main questions guiding this unit has been to analyze how history is constructed. How does interpretation and perspective shape the writing or telling of history? How will labeling a group influence how the "history" is written or told? Will this history be presented from a particular point of view because of these labels?

Suggested Procedure

1. Tell the class that they have been assigned to a group. Explain to the class that this is the closure activity and that they will get the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned from this unit. Review with them some of the key words and questions from the *Orientation Activity*.

2. Explain to the class that there will be two types of groups—performers and historians. Each member in each group should wear a nametag. Just as they have done with all the activities in this unit, each group will receive an *Activity Card* giving the group instructions.

3. Allow the groups to go to their working areas. Distribute Activity Cards to the performers. Explain to them that they will have twenty minutes to prepare their skits.

4. Meet with the historians alone. Tell them that they are **only** to observe the groups of performers and should not speak to the performers until after the presentations. Distribute the appropriate Activity Card and Observation Sheet to each of the groups of historians. Allow the groups of historians to meet and encourage them to briefly discuss the kinds of things they would like to observe.

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5. Meet with the Fish Bowl Historians separately. Inform them that they will have an additional task in that they will be observing the other historians observe the performers. Explain to them the purpose of the fish bowl technique.

6. Tell all the historians to return and begin their observations of the performers. Remind them that they should not talk with the performers until the entire activity has finished. The historians can begin their observations while the performers are preparing their skits.

7. Have the groups perform their scenes. Remind the groups of historians that they should take notes and be ready to prepare a report.

8. After all the groups have performed, allow the historians to ask the performers questions. Then have each group of historians present their report on what they observed. Most groups will need some time to decide on a presenter and to agree on the content of their report. Since the "Fish Bowl" Historians have the additional task of observing the other historians in action, have them report last to the entire class.

9. Once all the groups of historians have made their observations, ask the entire class some of the following questions:

- As performers, how did you feel being observed by these historians? How did these observers influence what you presented?
- As historians, how did the labels, "Spanish," "Aztec," or "Fish Bowl" influence your observations?
- Why is this activity important to keep in mind when you are studying the history of some event?
- How would you relate this activity to some current event?

10. Conclude the class by giving them specific feedback about some of the many abilities they have demonstrated throughout the unit.

handout 3

GROUP 1 PERFORMERS ACTIVITY CARD

As a group your task is to perform a skit of the moment in history which is described in the box below. Take time to consider this moment carefully. Remember what you have learned about the Aztecs and the Spanish throughout the unit.

As you prepare the skit, consider the following questions:

- What information should be included as part of this skit?
- How should this moment be captured in the presentation?
- What were the Aztecs thinking when they encountered the Spanish?
- What were the Spanish thinking when they encountered the Aztecs?
- What happened at that moment when they saw each other?

MOMENTS IN HISTORY

This moment in history takes place in a small village on the coast of the Yucatán Peninsula near where the Spanish first anchored their ships. A group of Spanish soldiers have been sent to look for water. Near the river they encounter a group of Aztecs. Neither group can speak the other's language. This is the first time these groups have ever seen each other.

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GROUP 2 PERFORMERS ACTIVITY CARD

As a group your task is to perform a skit of the moment in history which is described in the box below. Take time to consider this moment carefully. Remember what you have learned about the Aztecs and the Spanish throughout the unit.

As you prepare the skit, consider the following questions:

- What information should be included as part of this skit?
- How should this moment be captured in the presentation?
- What was Cortés thinking when he met Montezuma?
- What was Montezuma thinking when he met Cortés?
- What happened at that moment when they saw each other?

MOMENTS IN HISTORY

The moment in history your group will perform is when Cortés and Montezuma first met. Cortés and his group marched into the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan to meet Montezuma, the leader of the Aztecs.

handout 5

GROUP 3 PERFORMERS ACTIVITY CARD

As a group your task is to perform a skit of the moment in history which is described in the box below. Take time to consider this moment carefully. Remember what you have learned about the Aztecs and the Spanish throughout the unit.

As you prepare the skit, consider the following questions:

- What information should be included as part of this skit?
- How should this moment be captured in the presentation?
- What was happening to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan?
- How were the Aztecs feeling during this time?
- How were the Spanish feeling?
- What was going on with the "common" people?

MOMENTS IN HISTORY

This moment in history takes place in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. It is a week after the Aztecs surrendered to the Spanish.

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AZTEC HISTORIANS ACTIVITY CARD

You are a group of Aztec Historians writing a new history book. Your task as a group is to observe the three skits that will be performed, take notes on the information presented in the skits, and ask questions to gather more information.

Use the following questions as a guide for your observations. Each member of the group should have an Observation Sheet to use to take notes.

- What information is presented in each skit?
- What point of view does each group take in presenting the information?
- How has each group interpreted the information?
- How does each group present a balance of perspectives?

Create some questions to ask the members of the group performing each skit.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

handout 7

AZTEC HISTORIANS
OBSERVATION SHEET

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #1

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #2

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #3

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SPANISH HISTORIANS ACTIVITY CARD

You are a group of Spanish Historians writing a new history book. Your task as a group is to observe the three skits that will be performed, take notes on the information presented in the skits, and ask questions to gather more information.

Use the following questions as a guide for your observations. Each member of the group should have an Observation Sheet to use to take notes.

- What information is presented in each skit?
- What point of view does each group take in presenting the information?
- How has each group interpreted the information?
- How does each group present a balance of perspectives?

Create some questions to ask the members of the group performing each skit.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

handout 9

SPANISH HISTORIANS
OBSERVATION SHEET

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #1

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #2

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #3

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"Fish Bowl" Historians
Activity Card

You are a group of Historians writing a new history book. "Fish Bowl" is a technique where one group observes another group. Your task as a group is to observe the three skits that will be performed, take notes on the information presented in the skits, and ask questions to gather more information. In addition, you will also observe the other groups of Historians.

Use the following questions as a guide for your observations. Each member of the group should have an Observation Sheet to use to take notes.

- What information is presented in the skits?
- What point of view do the groups take in presenting the information?
- How have the groups interpreted the information?
- How did the groups present a balance of perspectives?
- What kinds of questions did the Historians ask the groups?
- How did the Historians gather their information?
- How did the Historians interpret the skits?

Create some questions to ask the groups of performers and historians:

Performers

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

Historians

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

handout 11

"Fish Bowl" Historians
Observation Sheet

Moments in History #1

Moments in History #2

Moments in History #3

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_____ HISTORIANS
ACTIVITY CARD

You are a group of Historians writing a new history book. Your primary task is observe _____ as they prepare their skit and gather information for the book. In addition, you will observe the three skits that will be performed, take notes on the information presented in the skits, and ask questions to gather more information.

Use the following questions as a guide for your observations. Each member of the group should have an Observation Sheet to use to take notes.

- What information is presented in each skit?
- What point of view does the group take in presenting the information?
- How has the group interpreted the information?
- How does the group present a balance of perspectives?

Create some questions to ask the group performing.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

handout 13

_____ HISTORIANS
OBSERVATION SHEET

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #1

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #2

MOMENTS IN HISTORY #3

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NAMETAGS

Performer	Historian
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APPENDICES

appendix a

GLOSSARY & PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Pronunciation Key	
ä	pronounce like father or bother
a	pronounce like say or date
e	pronounce like meat or seat
o	pronounce like hope or bone
ü	pronounce like rule or youth
zh	pronounce like measure or seizure

Bernal Díaz del Castillo (bar näl•de azh•dal•kas te yo) one of the soldiers who was part of the expedition to Mexico. Castillo wrote a book about the conquest of Mexico called The True History of the Conquest.

Castile (kas tel) region of Spain

conquistador (kon ke stä dor) a person who conquers

Cozumel (ko sü mal) island off the Yucatán peninsula in Mexico

Diego Rivera (de a go•re ba ra) Mexican artist who painted elaborate murals

Diego Velasquez (de a go•va läs kaz) Spanish governor of the colony on Cuba who was in dispute with Hernando Cortés

Fray Bernardo de Sahagún (frä•bar nar do•da•sa ha gün) Spanish monk who learned the language of the Aztecs and was responsible for recording and translating Aztec documents

Guatemoc, Cuauhtémoc (kwa ta mok) leader of the Aztecs after Montezuma; Cuauhtémoc was killed by the Spanish.

Hernando Cortés (ed nan do•kortez) Spanish soldier who headed one of the first expeditions documented to Mexico

Huitzillan (wet se län) place in Tenochtitlan where Montezuma and Cortés first met

Huitzilopochtli (wet se lo poch tle) Aztec God whose name means "hummingbird on the left" the Aztecs believed that this God had to be given nourishment in the form of human blood.

maguey (ma ga) a type of plant from which fibers are derived to make rope and clothing

appendix a

Montezuma, Moctezuma (mon ta zu ma) leader of the Aztecs at the time when the Spanish landed in Mexico.

Nahuatl (na wa tal) common language of most of the peoples in the valley of Mexico at the time of the conquest

Pedro de Alvarado (pa dro•da•äl bä rä do) one of the soldiers who was part of the Spanish expedition to Mexico headed by Cortés

petatillo (pa tä ti yo) a style of engraving gold used by the Aztecs

quetzal (kat sal) an exotic bird found in Mexico and Central America whose feathers were used by ancient warriors

Tenochtitlan (ta noch te län) the Aztec capital city which dominated politically and militarily the valley of Mexico

Texcoco (tas ko ko) another major city of ancient Mexico which had an alliance with Tenochtitlan

Tlacaelel (tlä ca lal) leader of the Aztecs before the conquest who influenced the history of the Aztecs with his military expansion into the valley of Mexico and with ideas about Aztec religion.

Tlascala, Tlaxcala (tläs cä lä) commercial city north of Tenochtitlan which was independent. The Tlaxcalans, people from Tlaxcala, first attempted to wage a battle against the Spanish then later allied themselves with the Spanish against the Aztecs.

Tlatelolco (tläl ta lol co) semi-independent city north of Tenochtitlan

Totocalco (to to käl co) place where Montezuma stored the Aztec treasures

Xicotenga, Xicotencatl (she co tän gä) one of the leaders of the Txalcalans

Xoloco (sho lo co) small city at the entrance to Tenochtitlan

Yucatán (ü kä tän) region of Mexico which was dominated by the Mayans and one of the first places where the Spanish landed

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